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ABSTRACT

Interviews with 12 principals of K-12 schools in rural Saskatchewan examined practices enacted in 1992-93 to lessen the effects of the farm economic crisis on students. A seven-section literature review describes the financial, personal, family, and community components of the farm crisis in Canada and the United States and provides an overview of programs developed to combat the effects of the farm crisis. These programs include U.S. and Canadian family programs, programs for children, programs in U.S. and Canadian education, and Saskatchewan programs. The results of the principal interviews indicate that students were affected by the farm economic crisis in ways related to the physical quality of their lives, their behavior, shifting family employment patterns, and pressures to succeed in school. School responses to the crisis included curriculum modifications, alterations to teacher role, and changes in school procedures and relations with students and parents. Principals felt that ideal responses to student needs involved provision of professional counseling for students, additional time for staff to meet students' noninstructional needs, additional training for school personnel, curriculum to speak to present needs, and funding for student supplies. Principals also commented on student substance abuse, the effects of off-farm employment on parent participation, and rural "latch-key" children. Recommendations are offered concerning administration, budgeting, curriculum, and teacher education. Contains 41 references. (SV)

ED 399 101

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Farm Stress and School Practice

SSTA RESEARCH CENTRE REPORT: #95-12 DATE: Nov 1995

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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Farm Stress and School Practice

SSTA RESEARCH CENTRE REPORT: #95-12 DATE: Nov 1995

This report is a summary of a master's thesis entitled **School Practices Used To Lessen the Effects of the Farm Economic Crisis on Saskatchewan K-12 Schools** by Georgia Joorisity.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the structures and practices, as perceived by selected school principals, which were being planned and enacted in 1992-93 in K-12 schools in Saskatchewan to lessen the effects of the farm economic crisis on students. Interviews were conducted with twelve principals of K-12 schools in twelve different school divisions in rural Saskatchewan.

The study indicated that, during the period in which the research was conducted (1992-93), the farm economic crisis was having an effect on the students in these schools, and that structures and practices were being used to lessen those effects. The degree to which the economic situation affected the students varied from region to region. It was apparent that the more dependent on grain farming the area was, the more severely the crisis was being felt.

A long list emerged in response to the question which asked what practices principals and teachers were enacting to assist students to deal with economic change and emotional stress. Suggestions for ideal assistance are identified. Respondents reported ever-increasing responsibilities being expected of the education system and, consequently, increased demands on the rural teacher. To complicate the life of the rural teacher/administrator even more, these additional responsibilities were being coupled with a breakdown in the educational partnership in some rural areas. Implications for schools and personnel are discussed.

The opinions and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the author and may not be in agreement with SSTA officers or trustees, but are offered as being worthy of consideration by those responsible for making decisions.

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SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study attempted to discover Saskatchewan principals' perceptions of the effects of the farm economic crisis on the students in rural K-12 schools during 1992-93. In addition, data were collected to examine the structures and practices which these principals perceived as being enacted to lessen those effects.

The literature review is divided into seven sections. The first section provides information which establishes that there was a farm crisis in Canada and includes financial, personal, and family and community components of this crisis. The second section provides information which establishes that there was a farm crisis in the United States and also includes financial, personal, and family and community components. The remaining sections deal with an overview of programs which were developed to combat the effects of the farm crisis: programs for American families, programs for Canadian families, programs for children, programs in American education, programs in Canadian education, and Saskatchewan programs.

The research was qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted with twelve principals of K-12 schools in twelve different school divisions in rural Saskatchewan. Principals

were encouraged to enlist input from their staffs. Key informants for the interviews were identified by the use of informed references. Questionnaires were supplied to interviewees prior to the interviews.

Interviews were audio taped. Transcripts of the interviews were returned to the informants for changes, deletions, or additions. The data were analyzed under three phases, discovery (looking for themes), coding, and discounting (dealing with data contamination).

Students were found to be affected by the farm economic crisis in a variety of ways including the physical quality of their lives, their behavior, shifting family employment practices, and pressure to succeed at school.

Schools responded on a wide front from curriculum variations, to role alterations for teachers, and changes in both school procedures and relations with students and parents. Responses best suited to student needs related to the economic crisis included making available appropriate personnel (e.g., counsellors) plus time and training to deal with stressed students. Emphasis was also placed on specific curriculum and resource responses. The study draws conclusions as to the ideal practices schools may employ.

Study data also provide a picture of parents experiencing economic problems in rural Saskatchewan. Implications for schools and their associated personnel and institutions are discussed.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It would be difficult to imagine a publically funded education system more closely scrutinized or influenced by its public than that of rural Saskatchewan. Research indicates that in recent years rural Saskatchewan has undergone an economic crisis. To study the effects of the economic crisis in rural Saskatchewan is to study its effects on the rural family. To study the farm family is to study the children. Surely a study of children who are products of their environment must observe them as they enter the doors of the rural schools.

The purpose of this study was to examine the structures and practices, as perceived by selected school principals, which were planned and enacted in 1992-93 in K-12 schools in Saskatchewan to lessen the effects of the farm economic crisis on students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In recent years increasing emphasis has been placed on the importance of the partnership between the school, the home, and the community. Research shows that student achievement is significantly related to the extent to which parents are actively involved in, and support, their children's learning (Hawley, 1988). Students present themselves to schools as products of their environment. How then in the rural areas, do we close the school doors to the

possible effects of the farm economic crisis on these students? Despite the fact that programs to assist farm families have been in existence in Saskatchewan for several years, little seems to be in existence which is directed specifically toward the children of those families.

Education systems in farming areas of the United States have taken steps to recognize the effects of farm stress on their students and are striving to deal with it. The preface of one training manual for school personnel in Iowa reads

> Children Growing Up in Changing Times: The Role of the School in Community will provide participants with a review of the chronic nature of the change in rural America, the impact of those changes on children, and the key role that school personnel can play in implementing interventions which will help reduce the vulnerability of children growing up today (Blundall & Herzberg, undated, p. 2).

It was felt that research in the area of the effects of the farm economic crisis on Saskatchewan students in K-12 schools could serve as a valuable source of information for educators. Understanding and sharing any structures and practices already in place could prove to be a significant aspect of that research.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Farm Crisis in Canada

Changing world markets for farm products, coupled with lowered farm prices during the past decade, have had crippling

effects on farm income. Restricted and irregular cash flow together with large capital investment in a financially risky environment heightened the economic pressures on farming (Keating, Doherty & Munroe, 1986). The ratio of Saskatchewan net farm income to gross income fell steadily from 57% in 1950-53, to 39% in 1966-69 and thence to 24% in 1981-84 (Pipke, Svenson, & Driedger, 1987). Furthermore, in 1991 farm prices decreased 8.2% (Statistics Canada, 1992). Pipke et al. (1987) reported the average farm debt rose from $11,000 in 1971 to $67,000 in 1983. Saskatchewan provincial statistics indicated an increase in the outstanding farm debt in millions of dollars from 2,976.0 in 1980 to 4,295.9 in 1992 (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 1993). Farm Debt Review Board (1993) statistics showed that as of January, 1993, 14,314 farmers had been affected by the debt resolution process in Saskatchewan. Increase in farm bankruptcies in Saskatchewan as reported by Pipke et al. (1987) rose from 15 in 1981 to 48 in 1984 while Consumer and Corporate Affairs reported 146 Saskatchewan farmers filed for bankruptcy during the first three quarters of 1993 (Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, 1993). The Farm Credit Corporation (1993) reported the Corporation's real properties on hand in Saskatchewan increased from the number 233 in 1988 (with a carrying value of 18.5 millions of dollars; 123,116 acres owned and 114,462 acres leased) to 2,452 in 1993 (with a carrying value of 201.0 millions of dollars, 1,169,880 acres owned and 801,189 acres

leased). From 1971-1981 there was a 12.5% decline in the number of farms in Saskatchewan. A further decline of 5.8% was evident by 1986 (Pipke et al., 1987). Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics (1993) reported a decrease in the number of Saskatchewan farms from 67,318 in 1981 to 60,840 in 1991. Furthermore, of the Saskatchewan residents reported in 1971, 53% were urban and 47% were rural. By 1991, 63% were urban and 37% rural (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 1993).

In a study completed by the Battlefords Branch of the Mental Health Association of Saskatchewan, farmers were reported as having strong feelings about negative factors of the farming lifestyle. These factors centered around the word "stress" and symptoms of stress such as loneliness, sleeplessness, mental fatigue, headaches, irritability, and breakdowns in communications (Knudsen, Wilson, & Halko, 1985).

The relationship within the farm family was seen as altered. Couples with high financial stress tended to blame each other for economic losses (Rosenblatt & Keller, 1983). Comparing farm families to urban families, farmers reported significantly higher incidence of loss of temper, back pain, behaviour problems in children, forgetfulness, fatigue, headaches, marriage problems, sleep disruptions, and frequent illnesses (Walker & Walker, 1988). Between 1985 and 1990 residents of rural Saskatchewan used Saskatchewan Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (SADAC) services in increasing numbers. While the rural population had declined in these five years,

the treatment caseload for SADAC and funded agencies had increased by more than 60% (SADAC Profile, March, 1991). Rural suicide rates also increased.

Rural residents were forced to learn how to manage and survive in a period of rapid change. Breakdowns in family relationships translated into rural social problems as communities of farm families experienced these stresses. When the rural economy slumped and financial resources dried up many local organizations disappeared. Social "networking" decreased thus damaging the social fabric of many communities.

Smith, Culligan, and Hurrel (1977) reported the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health ranked farming among the ten most stressful occupations. Pipke et al. (1987) reported 78% of rural Saskatchewan respondents indicated at least one home or family problem and 59% indicated that these problems were serious enough to require additional help.

The Farm Crisis in the United States

> Commodity prices in Canada stayed at a higher level for a longer period due to a low Canadian dollar and Canadian Wheat Board price mechanism, according to Saskatchewan Agricultural Economist, Wayne Gamble. Thus farm incomes in Saskatchewan did not begin to decline as soon as in the U.S. (Burwell & Gamble, 1992 p. 22).

A generally agreed upon set of reasons for the change in the economic situation in agriculture includes the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, with the subsequent price increase of

oil, fuel, herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizer, the sharp rise in interest rates, embargoes on grain shipments to Communist countries, and vagaries of weather, pests, and disease (Carson, 1986). Murdock, Albrecht, Hamm, Leistretz, and Leholm (1986) reported more than 30% of the producers in some states had negative net cash farm incomes in 1984 and it appeared many producers would be forced to leave farming.

Hoyt (1988) and Beeson and Johnson (1987) described a relationship between economic duress and depression. Hargrove (1986) reported the farm economic crisis was resulting in substantial occurrences of social and psychological problems. One mental health centre serving rural residents reported a 200% - 300% increase in service utilization during a three year period (Ashley, 1986).

Williams (1992) witnessed five major effects on American farm families: physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and self-esteem. There was also a tendency to withdraw from other people, to depersonalize and view others with scepticism and/or scorn. Hoyt (1988) suggested one in five persons in rural areas was at risk due to depression. Belyea and Lobao (1990) reported a high relationship between hardship and stress and depression.

Programs for American Families

In the United States in the 1980s an organization called the Rural Family Focus Group operated under the auspices of

the National Council on Family Relations. Much of this group's activity was educational in nature supplemented by individual counselling and other services. Nine states were identified as having specific programs to assist American rural families. These programs included counselling and support services for legal, financial, family, and personal matters.

Materials for professional and personal use were available in many American rural areas. Illustrative materials include instruments such as the "Farm Family Assessment Instrument" (Davis -Brown & Salamon, 1987) and the "Family Stress Model" (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Several videotapes, films, kits, and booklets are also available.

Programs for Canadian Families

Pipke, et al. (1987) found that there was a broad range of services potentially available to farm families in Saskatchewan. Assisting farm people to change their negative perceptions of professionals and development of self-study methods were two key issues. Burwell and Gamble (1992) reported that farm people were reluctant to seek professional help. Walker and Walker (1987a) recommended that programming should emphasize the development of skills in problem solving, cooperative decision making, conflict resolution, and worry management through cognitive strategies.

A review of the literature revealed numerous

organizations which were readily available to farm families. In Saskatchewan, Dr. Nikki Gerrard of the Saskatoon Mental Health Clinic (1992) had designed a program to address farm stress. Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food operated a farm stress line; Saskatchewan Rural Development offered programs to rural families on developing skills for change; the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool conducted a series of stress seminars for farmers; the Saskatchewan Family Farm Foundation carried out seminars and workshops and the National Farmers Union organized farm crisis committees. The Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and United Churches together with the Mennonite Central Committee formed the Interchurch Committee on Agriculture. This group made recommendations to various farm and church organizations. In addition, a variety of audio-visual and print materials was available across the prairie provinces.

Programs for Children

While many programs had been activated for farm families in rural crisis, the literature revealed very few programs specifically designed for children. Jurich and Russell (1987) reported that children in rural families, as well as their parents, fell victim to the economic crisis in rural America. Children felt extremely vulnerable to the mounting stress and tension within the family. They often placed the blame for the farm crisis on themselves. Children and adolescents

punished themselves with guilt or they manipulated others to punish them by acting out in a socially disapproved way. Saskatchewan rural mental health workers indicated that there was family violence where there had never been any history of it. Children sometimes took on imagined burdens of having caused the problems, which could lead to depression, attempted suicide, and trouble with alcohol and other drugs (SADAC Profile, March, 1991).

Few programs were found to be available to children in rural areas. In a 1993 rural Saskatchewan telephone book under the heading, Community Services, the following organizations were listed who would offer advice to rural children and facilitate emergency assistance:

Child Protection Services
Crisis Information Line
Kids Help Phone

Programs in American Education

Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979) said that schools can provide one of the most effective protective factors for children under stress - a sense of success at a meaningful task. One school psychologist, surveyed by Judi Elliott (1987) in her research on rural students at risk, commented that the degree to which rural conditions pose educational risk is largely determined by the ability and willingness of rural schools to get involved in providing responsive, supportive environments equipped to provide the

resources students need. Elliott (1987) added

> Rural students must depend on their teachers and schools to provide them with a realistic picture of alternative goals, while at the same time providing students with the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to accomplish the goals. It becomes a major responsibility of rural schools to help students deal with the stress in their lives while at the same time equipping them with the skills necessary to view the future positively and become productive members of society p. 22).

American agencies have developed materials for both teacher inservice and classroom use. These include videotapes, handouts, and activity books.

Programs in Canadian Education

Teachers, school guidance counsellors, and principals across Canada largely perceived that the economic recession had some effect on the educational system (Burke & Bolf, 1982). Sylvia Gold (1983) reported the results of the recession on schools as: parents having less discretionary income; some signs of neglect being observed; youngsters experiencing negative behavioral changes; and high school students being despondent because of poor job prospects. The Burke study was commissioned in 1984 by the Canadian Teachers' Federation in order to document the reality of the teaching-learning situation in Canadian classrooms. The study reported that as unemployment rose so did trauma to children, sickness, premature death, suicide and homicide rates (Burke, 1984).

Saskatchewan Programs

Practices planned and enacted in K-12 schools to relieve student stress were in the initial stages only in Saskatchewan. Several school divisions had formed School Crisis Communication Teams (Gendur, 1991) to develop policies and protocol for dealing with emergencies. A review of curricula from Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment revealed four curricula which contained sections on stress or family life traumas.

METHOD

The research, which was qualitative in design, involved researcher observation and in-depth interviews. This design was chosen because, among other advantages, its holistic nature allowed a study of the entire setting in order to understand particular characteristics or phenomena. Researcher observation and interview techniques were suited to the complexity of the field situation. By using a pilot interview format, the interview guide could be adapted to include unanticipated questions. In addition, the research question was of the nature best served by purposive, rather than random, selection of informants. Finally, inductive data analysis was most appropriate because of the unanticipated outcomes of the research. It was recognized that "generalizations" in qualitative studies where data sources are limited in number are normally restricted to parameters within the purview of those data sources.

Collection of Data

Before selecting key informants, "high stress" farming areas in the province were identified by informed references. Because of the researcher's experience in rural Saskatchewan, it was important to be aware of possible researcher bias. Careful structuring of the interview guide under the advice of the thesis advisor was imperative. Pilot interviews were conducted with three principals in K-12 schools who had completed a graduate research class. Data were collected by conducting interviews with a total of twelve principals of K-12 schools in twelve school divisions in rural Saskatchewan. Principals were encouraged to enlist input from their staffs. The semistructured interviews, planned to accommodate the informants, were scheduled for approximately one hour each. Interviews were audio recorded.

Roberts and Burke (1989) said that the design of a study would emerge as it was conducted. This was true of the interview format. While the interview guide was followed, additions were prompted by the informant's disclosures. The following design features were included in the interview guide:

(1.) Sequence - general to specific
(2.) Organization - within themes
(3.) From closed to open questions
(4.) Probes, paraphrasing, summarizing.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated that when researchers write memos to themselves or keep a reflective field log, they

develop their thoughts. When thoughts are written down as they occur, regardless of how preliminary they are or in what form, the analysis process is started. A field journal recording impressions of the community and school was kept for seven of the twelve communities in which the interviews were actually conducted. The remaining interviews were conducted in locations other than the actual school and community. By arriving in the town ahead of interview time, the researcher had the opportunity to locate the school and record general impressions of the community. Data from the field journal were used for continual validation, giving the researcher a sense of "trueness" of the situation.

To enhance reliability several factors were taken into consideration. Researcher status position comparable to that of the researcher in this study are recommended for replication. Careful delineation of the types of people chosen as informants and the use of the reference technique to select informants minimized threats to reliability. In addition, detailed descriptions of the physical, social, and interpersonal setting and description of interview methodology and analysis procedures are given.

Various strategies were used to establish validity. Careful construction of the interview questions to avoid informant distortion, conducting interviews in natural settings when possible, and having interpretation of data reviewed by the thesis advisor and committee assisted with

maintaining internal validity. External validity was established through cross site comparisons of descriptions from all twelve informants. A degree of triangulation was obtained through the use of the field journal. Polkinghorne (1983) outlined avenues of knowledge as a basis for evaluating knowledge claims in human science research. Two of these avenues, innate and human reasonableness, and tacit knowledge derived from communal human experience and incorporated human intuition apply to this study.

Analyzing and Organizing the Data

Re-listening to interview tapes immediately followed the interview. Analysis of each interview proceeded before the next interview was conducted. Taped interviews were transcribed in total, with a large margin left on the right hand side of the page. These transcripts were sent to the interviewees for corrections, deletions, and additions.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) divided qualitative analysis into three phases: discovery, coding, and discounting. These were applied to the data.

(1.) The discovery phase involves reading the data, searching for emerging themes, developing concepts, and developing a story-line.

(2.) The coding phase involves developing a coding scheme for sorting the data into categories. Color coding was used to assist in the development of themes. Sections of the

transcripts coded as the same theme were then transferred to wall charts. These wall charts were then arranged and re-arranged until themes emerged.

(3.) The discounting phase involves checking the emerging concepts and theoretical propositions against possible bias and contamination. At this stage the researcher called upon the assistance of the advisor and committee members to check the chosen themes.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Six research questions formed the basis of this study. A summary of the significant findings follows.

Research Question 1

> What signs, if any, are you and your teachers observing to indicate that changes in the Saskatchewan farm economy are influencing the physical quality of life of your students? (examples - quality of lunches, purchase of new clothing, availability of money for field trips)

Most informants saw evidence that the physical quality of some of their students' lives was being influenced by the farm economy. They saw changes in nine areas.

1. Articles of clothing.
2. Noon hour and field trip lunches.
3. Student purchased school supplies.
4. Financing and support of field trips.
5. Extra expenditures or "the frills."
6. High school graduation celebrations.
7. Student vehicles.
8. School fund raising.
9. Money consciousness.

In addition to these areas of response, three additional themes emerged from Research Question 1 data. Interviewees saw definite economic strata developing within their communities, some parents were expressing a concern for the need for equity among students in regard to the quality of their school supplies, and principals saw evidence that parents were sacrificing in order that children could maintain accustomed standards.

Research Question 2a

> What types of behavioral problems have you as a staff encountered which you would consider to be illustrations of students experiencing stress or family problems?

Interviewees identified a wide variety of behavior illustrative of stress and family problems. This behavior included suicide attempts, sickness, actions requiring discipline, student expressions of concern, and behavior which exhibited lack of respect for themselves and others.

Research Question 2b

> Are you noticing differences in behavior problems over the past five years? If so, what is causing these differences?

At school principals saw evidence of behavioral changes reflected in the number of students who were being referred to or requesting interviews with counsellors. Interviewees also spoke of increased vandalism, aggressive behavior, and use of

alcohol and drugs.

Research Question 3

> Have you encountered incidents which you feel illustrate that farm economic pressures have had an impact either directly or indirectly on these student behaviors? If so, please describe some of these.

Respondents were aware of changes within the structure of the rural family, which were influencing their students' lives. Shifting family patterns including parental involvement in off-farm income and marriage break-down were two predominant changes. In many areas lack of opportunity to farm was adding to parental and self-inflicted pressure on students to achieve in high school in order to be accepted in post-secondary institutions. In some communities principals reported parent and student concern over threatened school closure.

Respondents reported ever-increasing responsibilities being expected of the education system and, consequently, increased demands on the rural teacher. In addition to being accountable for the academic development of their students, it was evident that school staffs had become increasingly responsible for the satisfaction of many of their students' physical, recreational, social, emotional, and guidance needs. Many of these responsibilities were being assumed without personnel having the appropriate professional education. To complicate the life of the rural teacher/administrator even

more, these additional responsibilities were being coupled with a breakdown in the educational partnership in some rural areas. Teachers were increasingly challenged concerning their responsibilities, accountability, and remuneration.

Research Question 4

> What practices, new or established, have you and your teachers enacted to assist students to deal with economic change and emotional stress?

Long lists of practices emerged in response to Research Question 4. These practices included

1. Changes in funding methods for extra-curricular activities and field trips.
2. Increased use of local facilities.
3. Variations in methods of school fund-raising.
4. Alterations to the traditional role of the educational psychologist.
5. Increased utilization of all available professionals.
6. Additional counselling roles for teachers and administrators.
7. Use of curriculum locally determined options, locally developed courses, and the Adaptive Dimension.
8. Development of special programs and feature days.
9. Use of alternative discipline approaches.
10. Presentation of parent workshops.

Research Question 5

> What would be some ideal responses within your school to assist students in coping with these problems you have discussed

with me?

The list of responses to this question included the following:

1. Increased availability of professional counselling by guidance counsellors and educational psychologists.

2. Additional time allotment for administrators and teachers to respond to students' non-academic needs.

3. Training for school personnel in methods of recognizing and dealing with student stress.

4. Introduction of curriculum to speak to present needs.

5. Funding for student supplies.

Research Question 6

> During the interview there is a possibility that other questions may arise which I will request you to answer. You may refuse to answer any of these. Also, I would appreciate any further information within the scope of these questions which you feel is not directly requested, but you could contribute.

In the course of the first three interviews three additional themes arose which dealt directly with rural students or rural schools. The researcher questioned subsequent interviewees directly about these topics.

Research Question 6a

> Has off-farm employment in your area affected the parental attendance at school functions and parent's availability for volunteer work?

Schools threatened with closure, lead the way in parental support, followed by schools in areas of least evidence of economic hardship. In areas experiencing severe economic hardship both parents and the school had adapted to the situation of "working parents".

Research Question 6b

> Has parental off-farm employment resulted in a new group of "latch-key kids", students getting off the school buses when no one is at home?

Some principals spoke of rural "latch-key kids" as a reality in their communities. Other respondents described special arrangements made by parents to avoid this situation.

Research Question 6c

> Is student use of alcohol or drugs a problem in your community? Have you seen an increased use of these substances in recent years?

When principals reported on the abusive use of substances by their students, their answers, unanimously, indicated these substances were being used in rural Saskatchewan. The extent and frequency of this use, however, varied with the area.

A picture of parents experiencing the economic problems in rural Saskatchewan, and how these conditions affected their reactions to the rural school also emerged from the study (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Rural Parental Reaction to Education During the Farm Economic Crisis as Perceived by Principals

Low Economic Stress Area	High Economic Stress Area	Threatened School Closure Area
Importance of Education		
Education viewed as important	Education viewed as important	Education viewed as important
Pressure on Students		
Students experience pressure to succeed	Parents exerting pressure on students to succeed	Students experience pressure to succeed
Desire for Equity		
Desire for student equity present	Parents voicing desire for student equity	Desire for student equity present
Setting Spending Priorities		
Limited priority setting	Spending priorities set -Cutbacks in "the frills" -Complaints re extracurricular activities and field trips -Sports take priority over arts activities -Complaints re school fund raising	School needs become priority
Teacher - Parent Partnership		
Good teacher-parent partnership	Breakdown in teacher-parent partnership -Teachers required to justify school routines and student evaluation -Teacher salaries criticized	Teacher-parent partnership established
Parent Availability		
Parents available to school	Parents not available to school - Distinct community classes develop - Increase in off-farm employment - Lowered availability of parent volunteers - Parental sacrificing - Family breakdown - Parents become less severe disciplinarian	Parents adjust to be available to school

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study indicated that, during the period in which the research was conducted (1992-1993), the farm economic crisis was having an effect on the students in the rural K-12 schools in Saskatchewan, and that structures and practices were being used to lessen those effects. The degree to which the economic situation affected the students varied from region to region. It was apparent that the more dependent on grain farming the area was, the more severely the crisis was being felt. Areas within the interview scope which were chiefly involved in cattle raising were less affected by the lowering farm income.

The research done for this study suggested implications for seven areas and therefore, the individuals or groups involved within those areas.

For Practicing Administrators

Data collected indicated the need for administrator attention and initiation of action in the following twelve areas:

1. The education and training of all school administrators and staff members in the identification of the symptoms of stress and the use of abusive substances by students, and techniques to deal with these problems.

2. The inservicing of parents, local boards of trustees, and teachers in the areas of suicide awareness, substance abuse, and parenting skills.

3. The development of school or school division trauma policies and the establishment of crisis response teams.

4. The continuation and enhancement of communications between the school, the home, and the community.

5. The assignment of staff meeting time for the assessment and discussion of students' social and emotional needs.

6. The choice of locally determined options and locally developed courses within the school curricula.

7. The re-commitment to the development of the Adaptive Dimension in the classroom. (The Adaptive Dimension allows for accommodation for diversity in student needs. It includes adjustments made to approved curricula, instruction, and learning environment.)

8. The inservicing of staff members on both new and established curricula, encouraging the use of modules and materials which pertain directly to rural areas and their problems.

9. The availability of updated resource centre materials both for teacher professional development and student use which emphasize occupations in agriculture and rural lifestyle.

10. The continuation of the development of schools which are centres of not only academic excellence but also physical, mental, social, and emotional growth.

11. The recognition of the importance of "school spirit" which includes the morale of all students and staff.

12. The importance of teachers having a sense of recognition, community importance, and professional pride.

For Provincial and School Division Budgeting

The results of this study indicate that two of the services most needed in rural schools during times of high economic stress are often two of the first items cut during budget decision making. They are student access to both

educational psychologists and trained vocational (guidance) counsellors. Educational psychologists are needed to supply immediate counselling assistance to troubled students. Vocational counsellors are an integral component in student choices of both high school subjects and post secondary institutions.

For Curriculum Development and Programming

This study re-affirms the need for continual review and affirmation of the foundational documents developed by Saskatchewan Education. Continued commitment to the following documents appears essential:

1. **The Goals of Education for Saskatchewan**

> Goals of education in Saskatchewan should direct efforts to develop the potential of ***all*** (italics added) students in the province. Education should affirm the work of ***each individual*** (italics added) and lay the foundation for learning throughout life (Saskatchewan Education, 1984, p. 26-28).

If the partners in education continue to support the goal statement, curriculum development and programming are required to speak to the needs of students as outlined by the research done for this thesis.

The goal statement contains nine sub-headings. Five of these sub-headings speak directly to the findings of this study. They are as follows:

Self-Concept Development
Positive Life Style

Career and Consumer Decisions
Membership in Society
Growing with Change

At a time when new curricula are being written, attention could be given to the development of foundational objectives within those curricula which would assist in the achievement of these five goals.

2. Directions

A second foundational document from Saskatchewan Education, Directions (1984), contains these words in the Vision Statement

> Attention is given to the needs of individual learners. The school curriculum is designed to teach basic skills, yet remain flexible enough to accommodate the needs of ***all*** (italics added) students. A well-organized ***network of counselling and support services*** (italics added) is available to students who require such services (p. 5).

The accessibility to a network of counselling and support services, noted in 1984, is not operating at an optimum level in many rural systems. The network remains in place, however, the availability of the professionals within this network is falling far short of the need.

3. The Adaptive Dimension in Core Curriculum

A third foundational document, The Adaptive Dimension in Core Curriculum (1992), states

> Students entering the education system present many challenges to the teacher. Differences in language proficiency,

> ***family constructs, cultural backgrounds, economic circumstances and experiential background*** (italics added) are but a few of the diversities for which adaptations must be made (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 4).

This document also declares

> The Adaptive Dimension enables the teacher to:
> - address students' cultural needs
> - accommodate community needs
> - increase curriculum relevance for students (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 1).

Rural systems should have been encouraged by Saskatchewan Education to fully inservice their teachers on the extent of the empowerment which was being given by this document. The potential for development of locally determined programming to meet cultural and community needs, given by this document, was never widely recognized. In addition, cross-curricula development in the following areas should be a priority:

- Identification of stress
- Coping with change
- Control and use of abusive substances
- Identification and study of a rural culture
- Rural-urban understanding

For the Role of Support Personnel

This study clearly indicated the support personnel most often requested by school principals were vocational (guidance) counsellors and educational psychologists.

For the Implementation of the Common Essential Learnings (C.E.L.'s) Within the Classroom

The results of this study suggest the continued and

improved implementation of the C.E.L.'s within the classroom would be advantageous to rural students. Concentrated development of three of the six C.E.L.'s could be an avenue for speaking directly to the difficulties being experienced by rural students involved in the pressures of the farm economic crisis.

1. Critical and Creative Thinking

Saskatchewan Education (1988) stated

> Almost all of the thinking which we undertake contains some critical and some creative aspects. For example, when we try to solve real life problems we move back and forth several times between creative and critical reflection as we develop solutions, or weigh the consequences of any one solution. It is important, therefore, that any attempts to improve thinking abilities pay attention to both critical and creative aspects of thinking (p. 29).

Faced with the changes in the rural economy and lifestyle, it is essential that rural students learn to seek creative alternative solutions to problems, and critically analyze each solution in order to select the one which is most appropriate.

2. Personal and Social Values and Skills

> Personal and Social Values and Skills is that complex of knowledge, values, attitudes and abilities which contribute to the development of a strong moral character, a sense of community, and competence in responding to the personal, social, and cultural aspects of life (Saskatchewan Education, 1988, p. 42).

There exists in Saskatchewan a rural culture which respects and yet transcends the multi-cultural background of its rural communities. Awareness of, and respect for this rural culture, its life style and value system should be encouraged and respected within the rural classroom.

3. Independent Learning

Two of the goals specifically stated for the development of this C.E.L. are

- develop individuals with:
  self determination
  self-direction
  self-respect
- develop students who can:
  effectively participate in society
  meet the challenge of rapid social change
  (Saskatchewan Education, 1988, p. 51).

Continued concentration on the implementation of these goals for Independent Learning would speak directly to the findings of this research which identified the presence of student stress during times of change.

For Teacher Education

Teachers enrolled in Saskatchewan Teacher Education Programs at both the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan should be required to complete courses specifically designed to prepare them for teaching in rural areas. These courses could include such modules as:

1. multi-grading,
2. identification of student stress,

3. orientation to rural culture and customs,
4. teacher/parent/community relations
5. climate of the rural school.
6. rural school field experience

For Integrated Community Planning

Close cooperation and integrated strategic planning among rural school divisions, municipalities, and communities could result in the introduction of needed services outside the financial scope of any one individual organization. Possible integrated services include the following:

1. Community professional counselling services and wellness centres.

2. Workshops on suicide awareness, use of abusive substances, the changing family unit.

3. School-business partnerships particularly with provincial, national and multi-national companies and organizations such as the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and chemical, fertilizer, and machinery companies. As well, these partnerships could include continued and additional encouragement of business sponsored awards and bursaries to rural high school students.

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